

## Book Reviews

*Past Meets Future: Saving America's Historic Environments*, edited by Antoinette J. Lee. Washington, DC. The Preservation Press, 1992. 288pp., illus.

**Reviewed by Robert E. Stipe, Emeritus Professor of Design, North Carolina State University, Raleigh, NC.**

This book is a repository of the papers of key participants in the 1991 San Francisco meeting of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, celebrating the 25th anniversary of the passage of the National Historic Preservation Act. Predictably enough, according to its title, the book looks at where we have been, where we are, and where we—the preservation movement, that is—are headed.

It is a tough book to review. In its entirety, it reminds me of the local upscale cafeteria to which my wife and I occasionally repair for supper. Behind the tray line is a variety of beautifully-arranged dishes for every taste, from white wine and quiche to canned Pepsi, barbeque and Brunswick Stew. Something for everyone and every taste.

So it is with this book: a handsomely-edited arrangement of all the best concoctions of current preservation philosophy, edibly prepared, sequentially arranged, elegantly presented, and offered at a reasonable price—\$25.95, which is not an outrageous price for a book these days.

Excellence abounds. In addition to its strikingly handsome format, for which production manager Diane Maddex must be specially credited, all 32 essays easily pass a threshold level of substance, coherence, and readability (although in a few cases one detects the imprint of the fine hand of editor Toni Lee). In terms of content, there is also revealed, explicitly and implicitly, the abundance of the tensions and contradictions so symptomatic of every broad-based social movement.

By contrast with National Trust annual meetings of yesteryear, one finds in this record relatively little of such traditional topics as house museum management, archeology, or preservation education, except as they deal with the need for a broader, more inclusive historical perspective, or occasionally, matters of social equity. Perhaps this reflects nothing more than a tendency for national conferences in many fields to focus with greater intensity on an increasingly narrow range of topics. However, a cynic would also recognize the faint odor of PC or the special concerns of a rising generation of younger preservationists with people—rather than building—concerns—the very topic with which this conference, by design, was intended to deal. While the emphasis is perhaps appropriate for the times, many traditional preservationists will come away from such a conference and its permanent record with a sense of isolation or

personal irrelevance.

Few in this volume are heard to say kind words about the suburbs, suburban living, rubber-tired transportation, or the malling of America—quite the contrary. And if there is considerable agonizing over the continuing plight of central cities, a subject I would be the last to belittle, there is also comfort in the belated recognition that historic preservation programs can make a significant contribution to the solution of that problem. (See the July, 1972 issue of the Trust's *Preservation News* containing an article to this effect by this reviewer, who was then roundly criticized by the Washington preservation establishment for holding such revisionist views.) The essays of Arthur Ziegler, Brown Morton, and Patricia Gay, dealing with this phenomenon, are well stated. Ziegler was, of course, one of the first to recognize the connection between preservation and people.

In other topical areas, Sam Stokes's insights regarding the imperative for preserving the heritage of rural America and the American landscape should be required reading for everyone still fixated on architecture (especially the nobler bits and pieces) as the primary associative value in preservation; and the superb essays by Boasberg, Sax and Shepherd are all the response the preservation community presently requires to counter the noisy fulminations of today's advocates for "property rights." Donovan Rypkema's treatise on the origins of real estate value is the most articulate and persuasive ever to reach the eyes of this reviewer.

Other tensions are nicely handled, even if less space is devoted to them than is desirable. Michael Tomlan posits an interesting and potentially useful theory concerning the difficulty of defining when something is old enough to be worth preserving. Carried to its logical conclu-

**Reviewed by Chester H. Liebs, professor of history and founder and director of the Historic Preservation Graduate Program, University of Vermont, Burlington, VT.**

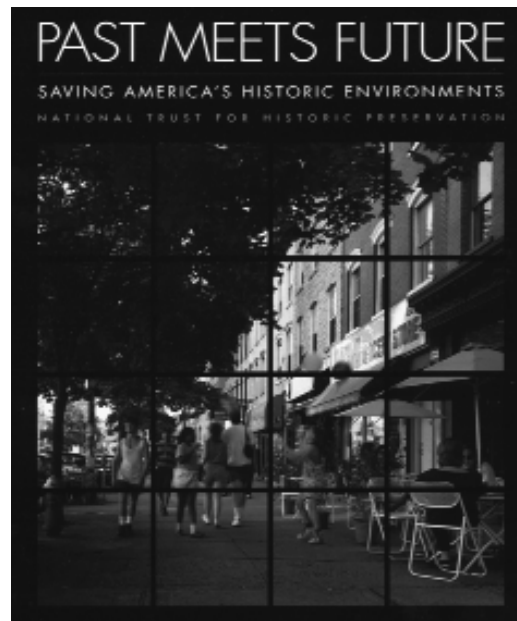
In October 1991, the National Trust, National Park Service, and Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, celebrated the 25th anniversary of the National Historic Preservation Act with a major symposium on the past and future of the preservation field. A national advisory committee sent out a call for papers. It then sugared down the over 200 queries received into a couple of dozen conference papers. *Past Meets Future* is the post-conference book containing edited versions of the papers presented, plus a few more salted in for good measure. The book also contains a list of conference recommendations.

In his provocative essay in the book titled "Personal Dialogues with Ghosts," South Street Seaport Museum President Peter Neill

expresses concern that preservation "has earned public indifference by its own history of exclusionary complacency and failed imagination...This failure is based on our fascination with objects, our insistence in seeing buildings as ends in themselves rather than as chapters in narrative, contexts for history, places for people." Many of the papers in this volume, however, suggest at least on paper, that preservation in the 1990s is

"brains on" and full speed ahead.

The clear standout both at the conference and in the book is the paper by now Secretary of Housing and Urban Development Henry G. Cisneros, a Mexican American, and former Mayor of San Antonio. Cisneros categorizes the near future of America as a clash between two worlds—a decentralized, well-educated, aging, and high-tech world dominated by Americans of European descent, and a more poorly educated, younger, rapidly growing world of Native, African,



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Latin, and in some cases Asian Americans. Having no doubt gained firsthand knowledge from his former experience as Mayor of multi-cultural San Antonio, and its highly effective, inclusive, and sophisticated preservation community, Cisneros sees preservation as a forum of negotiation between these two worlds.

The language Cisneros uses to describe the importance of historic resource conservation is more highly evolved than current preservation institutional speak. For Cisneros, preservation offers “an intelligent way of relating people to their human origins,” a means to “stimulate a sense of intellectual inquiry, excitement, and hunger for continuous learning,” and assistance in “the process of multicultural adaptation.”

Other papers also explore this larger dimension of preservation. W. Brown Morton III asserts that “geographic displacement, social estrangement, and the loss of cultural memory seriously erode the possibility of successful human development for millions of Americans.” He exhorts the field to place greater emphasis on “social significance.”

Antoinette J. Lee sees America moving from “melting pot” to a “salad bowl” with visible ingredients. She challenges preservationists to record and preserve the “initial adaptations to the American scene” of recent immigrant groups. Like Cisneros, she hopes that a greater unity will emerge from a recognition of differences.

Richard Longstreth is also concerned with expanding preservation’s purview, in this case to conserving the design legacy of the mid-to-late 20th century. He calls for “the expunging of taste, or current aesthetic predilections, as a force in decision making.” He also implores the field to spend less energy sorting the cultural residue by “contexts,” while placing more emphasis on “substantive interpretation.”

Still another voice for inclusiveness and breadth of interpretation is David McCullough. From a mind which has explored, in great depth, historical phenomena from the building of the Brooklyn Bridge to the childhood of Theodore Roosevelt, comes the realization that preservation is not about saving old things. McCullough observes that what really draws us to the past is a fascination with “What changed? What was new?” He also reminds us that “history is a spacious realm. There must be no walls.” These calls for inclusiveness are balanced by notes of caution. Tersh Boasburg observes that “as preservationists find that their first-tier goals are being achieved—securing protection for the most obvious and most significant resources—they are extending their reach

to protect less architecturally distinguished structures and districts.” He then warns that this may lead to “a concomitant loss of political power.” This point is an interesting juxtaposition to Cisneros’ who sees greater power in expanding the dialog. Striking a similar chord to Boasburg’s, Randall T. Sheppard declares, “There should be a unified agenda for preservation in this country. There should be a commitment to a single script.”

One of the major proponents of the single-script school for preservation is Larry Light who reports in the book the results of a market research survey he conducted for the National Trust. Light concludes that “inconsistency breeds uncertainty,” and he suggests that preservationists “must speak with one focused and consistent voice.” Yet the conclusions of his survey appear to offer a complex portrait of general attitudes of the present public toward the past. His findings ranged from the view that “preservation’s mission is to preserve the best, the most differentiating, the most relevant qualities of the past” to a recognition of people’s hunger for “a true and genuine picture of America’s diverse heritage.”

The data, then, also seems to support the conclusion—opposite to Light’s perceived longing for uniformity—that the public both expects preservation to edit the cultural memory, and to present the unabridged version at the same time. Light’s work poses an interesting question. Is the field best served by masking these differences with market-researched unifying themes or are a diversity of views and approaches a strength? Most likely the ghosts of Ruskin, Morris, and Viollet-le-Duc will continue to haunt the field.

The book is crammed with an array of other perspectives. Jerry Rogers hopes the era of federal government plundering for short-term profit of “the largess of all the people” is over. Blaine Cliver calls for creation of a “national organ bank” of new uses waiting to be matched up with endangered historic buildings, and Patricia Gay discusses the effect of anti-urban media values on the task of renewing cities. Sam Stokes calls for greater alliances with environmentalists to save the rural landscape. David Lowenthal places the discourse in a global context. Michael Tomlan does a Siskel-and-Ebert-like medley of thumbs up and thumbs down on recent developments in the field, and preservation patriarchs Arthur Ziegler Jr. and William J. Murtagh present interesting retrospectives.

Many other papers in the book are worthy of mention but this would call for a longer review than time and space permit. The many challenging conference recommendations, compiled by Peter Brink and Grant Dehart, must also be left to another reviewer to pursue.

Now for a few words on the downside. One thing the book solely lacks is commentary. Inclusion of some of the questions raised and critiques offered by conference participants would have helped place the many different perspectives presented in better context. It would also have made the book more of a record of a dialog rather than an anthology of monologues.

For all the issues covered there are also surprising gaps. Perhaps I missed it but I could not find a mention of lead paint, an issue which may have profound consequences on the nation’s perception of old buildings, and their future viability. Major figures like James Marston Fitch, and his role in historic preservation in America, were not mentioned, while an article at the end of the book ignores many of the intellectual and applicational roots of heritage education. A compelling case can be made for a number of historians to begin simultaneously researching the history of preservation posthaste.

These few shortcomings do not detract from the fact that *Past Meets Future* is a very stimulating collection of essays expressing the precepts, conflicts, and hopes of the preservation field today. In his introduction, National Trust chair Robert Bass hopes the book will help answer “how historic preservation can best make its contribution to the lives of people in the years ahead.” The essays in the book certainly do. The conference sponsors and editor Lee are to be congratulated.

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sion (although he does not say it), it carries the strong implication that the 50-year rule should be strengthened or lengthened to 60- or 70 years. Bryan Mitchell’s blunt statement concerning the tension between Washington, the states and, by implication, local governments, hits the nail right on the head. While lip service is paid throughout the book by a number of the essayists to the importance of local government involvement in preservation, the book nonetheless subtly betrays a paternal, federal mindset, perhaps inevitably, given that preparation of the San Francisco agenda was shared by the National Trust with the Advisory Council and the National Park Service.

One of the important current tensions within the preservation movement is that of multiculturalism. The issue of *pluribus* v. *unum* is presented in Dr. Lee’s chapter in a compelling way, notwithstanding her discernible bias toward the *pluribus*, which is clearly shared in greater or less degree by most of the San Francisco conference participants who dealt with the issue. However, many of the systemic and practical problems of definition, administration and political authority yet to be presented by this new emphasis remain

to be addressed. A future conference and book will no doubt deal with these in a balanced way, and perhaps Dr. Arthur Schlesinger will be invited.

Are there any negatives? Yes. A few essays, presumably included for public relations purposes, are so short that they add little to the substance of the book. One could wish in such a publication for fewer essays and greater explication in those remaining. In fact, much of the substance of this conference is as well or better stated in the Trust's own *Preservation: Toward an Ethic in the 1980s* (The Preservation Press, 1980), containing the recommendations of its 1978 annual meeting in Chicago and a subsequent Williamsburg seminar in 1979. Not all that much has changed, and it is both interesting and ironic that a national historic preservation movement has such a short institutional memory.

The inclusion of the text of the National Historic Preservation Act, without elaboration or commentary, is a waste of pages and effort, again betraying an inner-Beltway mindset. And although not a negative, the absolutely superb effort of Peter Brink and Grant Dehart to make sense of all this and to define a comprehensive course of action for the future should have been set in bold-face type and given a much more prominent display and location in the overall publication. (Most readers skip over Forewords, Acknowledgments and Introductions, and for any reader to be allowed to escape the Brink-Dehart formulation for the future is most unfortunate.)

Finally, given the emphasis throughout the book on "putting people first" in preservation, it is interesting to note that of its 79 illustrations, there are fewer than 10 (not counting the dust jacket) in which there are any recognizable faces to counter the inevitable preoccupation with buildings, structures, districts and objects. Whether this is the result of tension, contradiction, or a mere Freudian slip is a matter of conjecture.

But all this is mere carping. On balance, this book rings clear in its overall message, and it is a very good investment for anyone who requires a current reading on the people who do preservation.

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## Preservation Resources

### New from the National Register

Several new publications, including three new *National Register Bulletins*, are now available from the National Register

of Historic Places, Interagency Resources Division, National Park Service. *National Register Bulletins* provide technical guidance for citizens; preservation professionals; and federal, state, and local government agencies preparing National Register of Historic Places nominations. The new bulletins focus on the diverse topics of cemeteries and burial places, historic battlefields, and historic mining sites. They fulfill a need for guidance on the registration of increasingly fragile resources, threatened by development, neglect, or environmental hazards, and reflect a more comprehensive appreciation for all aspects of our cultural heritage. Each of the new bulletins discusses the National Register Criteria for Evaluation, and provides examples of how to apply the criteria to the various resources.

*National Register Bulletin 40: Guidelines for Identifying, Evaluating, and Registering America's Historic Battlefields*, written by National Register historian Patrick W. Andrus, responds to the overwhelming national interest in documenting and preserving Civil War sites. The bulletin provides guidance on identifying, evaluating, and registering historic battlefields from all eras of our history. Sections on assessing the integrity and defining boundaries for historic battlefields are significant components of this bulletin. It provides clear guidance on developing historic contexts and conducting research and survey. The extensive bibliography and glossary of terms are invaluable to researchers.

Cemeteries and burial places are significant resources that represent themes and customs important in America's history. These places are coming under increasing threat due to abandonment, theft, vandalism, and environmental hazards. The fragility of cemeteries, monuments and burial places, and interest in funerary art, social history, landscape design, and cultural diversity, has fostered an increased awareness of their significance. *National Register Bulletin 41: Guidelines for Evaluating and Registering Cemeteries and Burial Places*, written by Beth Bolland, National Register historian, and Elisabeth Walton Potter, National Register coordinator for the Oregon State Historic Preservation Office, provides needed guidance on evaluating cemeteries and burial places, and on how to apply the National Register Criteria—special attention is paid to the National Register Criteria Considerations. The bulletin includes a concise description of selected historical trends that influenced American burial customs and cemetery design. The glossary and bibliography will prove to be an important first step for research on the topic.

The United States is one of the world's leading producers of precious metals.

Mining has made a significant impact on settlement and modification of America's landscape. *National Register Bulletin 42: Guidelines for Identifying, Evaluating, and Registering Historic Mining Properties*, written by Bruce Noble, historian in the Preservation Planning Branch, Interagency Resources Division, Washington, and Robert Spude, chief, National Preservation Programs Branch, Rocky Mountain Regional Office, provides invaluable guidance on the documentation and evaluation of historic mining sites—particularly challenging as many of the sites were constructed for temporary use. Today they are extremely fragile resources. Rather than concentrating on mining camps and their architecture, this bulletin focuses on frequently over-looked mining sites and industrial areas, including iron works, precious metal mills, dredges, and associated out-buildings. Sections on the identification of mining related property types, applying the National Register Criteria and Criteria Considerations, and the selected bibliography, are particularly useful.

*The Manual for State Historic Preservation Review Boards*, written by Patrick W. Andrus, with Susan L. Henry, Stephen A. Morris, and John W. Renaud of the Preservation Planning Branch, Michael J. Auer of the Preservation Assistance Division, and Caroline R. Bedinger, Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record, is a comprehensive guide for individuals serving on State Historic Preservation Review Boards. The manual covers issues relating to the Review Board, from duties of the board and ethics, to the role of the Historic Preservation Fund in preservation. The sections on the National Register of Historic Places, environmental review, Certified Local Governments (CLGs), Tax Incentives, Documentation, and Public Participation, make this manual extremely useful for all individuals involved in historic preservation. The appendix includes a listing of agencies, both government and private sector, that are involved in historic preservation, federal laws affecting historic preservation, and a glossary of terms.

To obtain copies of these and other National Register publications, please contact the National Register of Historic Places, Interagency Resources Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC, 20013-7127; 202-343-5726.

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